# Data on Mass Murder by Government in the 20th Century

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This post presents the data for the mass murders by the Nazi regime and its allies, by Communist regimes and their allies, and by other governments. This week is an especially appropriate time to reflect on mass murder by government. Kristallnacht was 84 years ago today, November 9, 1938. Two days ago, November 7, was the National Day for the Victims of Communism.

During the 20th century, governments murdered over 200 million people. This figure excludes battle deaths from wars. The tables below are from my just-published article *Guns Kill People, and Tyrants With Gun Monopolies Kill the Most*, 25 Gonzaga Journal of International Law 29 (2021). The data cover 1900 to 1987 and are mainly based on the scholarship of the late University of Hawaii political science professor Rudolph J. Rummel. The few instances in which different figures are used are explained in my article.

The tables below do not used the word "genocide," because that term, as defined in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, is too narrow. At the insistence of Josef Stalin, the Genocide Convention applies to some mass murders by government (e.g., targeting racial, ethnic, or religious groups) but not to others (e.g., targeting victims for class warfare or ideological reasons). Hence, prof. Rummel coined the term "democide" to describe noncombat mass murders for any reason.

As the tables indicate, mass murders are perpetrated by dictatorial regimes of various stripes. Communist regimes are far away the most murderous. The tables list 17 communist regimes that murdered at least 100,000 people. Overall, the communists murdered approximately 168,759,000 from 1900 to 1987.

On the whole, the most-murderous fascist regimes proved to be less durable than their communist counterparts, so their killing sprees did not last as long. The 1900-87 murder count by fascist regimes was 27,848,000.

Fascist regimes are those that were explicitly aligned with the political theories of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini. Mussolini had been a socialist, but he broke with

the party because of its internationalist class perspective and its opposition to World War I. Mussolini recast the totalitarian side of (some) socialist ideology into a nationalist mold.

All these figures are rough midpoint estimates. They come from a scholar who dedicated his outstanding career to quantifying mass murder by government and examining it causes.

**TABLE 1**

**Mega-Murders—Over 1 Million Victims**

Regime Years Democide (000,000s) Summary

**A. Dekamurders (over 10 million victims)**

People's Republic of China. 1949-87. 87.6 million people murdered. Mao et al. communist regime. Does not include 3.5 million murders by Chinese communists during the 1927-49 civil war.

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. 1917-87. 61.9 million people murdered. Communist regime. Includes 54.8 million within the Soviet Union, plus 6.9 million in areas conquered by the USSR. Josef Stalin's rule (1929-53) accounts for 43 million. On an annualized basis, the pre-Stalin regime founded by Lenin was more murderous than the post-Stalin one.

Germany. 1933-45. 20.9 million people murdered. National Socialist German Workers Party (Nazi). Includes Hitler regime's murders throughout occupied Europe. Does not include WWII battle deaths.

China, 1928-49. 10.1 million people murdered. Kuomintang party. Although the party was originally Leninist in orientation, I did not count them in the communist total.

**B. Megamurders (over 1 million victims)**

Japan. 1936-45. 6.0 million people murdered. Military dictatorship. Principally, war crimes perpetrated by the Japanese army against civilians in occupied nations, such as China or the Philippines. Although the ideology was not derived from Mussolini, the regime allied with the European fascists in WW II, and Japan is counted as a fascist regime.

China. 1923-49. 3.5 million people murdered. Communist revolutionary army before victory in 1949. As with all the data, there are no battle deaths. The killings were of civilians in areas controlled by the communist army.

Cambodia. 1975-79. 1.5 million people murdered. Khmer Rouge communist regime. Per capita, the largest democide against a domestic population. Includes murders of ethnic minorities, intellectuals, and dissidents, plus deaths from slave labor.

Turkey. 1909-18. 1.9 million people murdered. Young Turks regime. Military dictatorship killings of Armenians and other Christians.

Vietnam. 1945-87. 1.7 million people murdered. Communist. Includes 1.1 million in Vietnam and 0.6 million in Laos and Cambodia. Does not include battle deaths.

Poland. 1945-48. 1.6 million people murdered. Communist regime, post-WWII. Ethnic cleansing of German population, including in former German areas given to Poland after the war. Deaths mainly from subhuman conditions of deportation.

Pakistan. 1970-71. 1.5 million people murdered. Islamist military dictatorship. A 267-day military attack by West Pakistan on East Pakistan (which is now the independent nation of Bangladesh). The attacks were ended by Indian military intervention. The figure does not include battle deaths.

Yugoslavia. 1944-63. 1.1 million people murdered. Josip Broz Tito communist dictatorship. Mass killings of ethnic groups and non-communists in 1944-46, plus deaths in slave labor camps through 1963.

**Suspected megamurders** (Data are less certain, so estimates are rougher.)

North Korea. 1948-87. 1.7 million people murdered. Sung family's communist absolute monarchy. Includes killings of prisoners of war and civilian South Koreans during the Korean War (1950-53).

Mexico. 1900-20. 1.4 million people murdered. Porfiro Díaz authoritarian regime till 1911; revolutionary regimes and warlords thereafter. Deaths of Indians and peons on slave labor haciendas, plus massacres of civilians and conscription into slave labor by various forces in the civil wars of 1911-20.

Russia. 1900-17. 1.1 million people murdered. Czarist regime. Includes about 0.5 million from Russian Empire Armenian irregulars slaughtering Kurds in Turkey in WWI, in reprisal for genocide of Armenians in Turkey. Most of the rest from deaths

of prisoners of war in WWI. Some from Jewish pogroms.

**Total death toll of megamurders:** 203.5 million.

**TABLE 2**

**Next-Largest European Domestic Mass Murders**

Regime Years Democide Summary

Albania. 1944-87. 100,000 people murdered. Communist. Ultra-totalitarian regime of Enver Hoxha.

Balkan Christians. 1912-13. 10,000 people murdered. Targeted by various governments.

Bulgaria. 1944-87. 222,000 people murdered. Communist.

Czechoslovakia. 1945-48. 197,000 people murdered. Coalition government including democrats and communists. Primarily reprisals and ethnic cleansing of German-speaking population. The figure is not included in the communist total above.

East Germany. 1945-87. 70,000 people murdered. Communist.

Hungary. 1919-44. 138,000 people murdered. Authoritarian. Includes 79,000 in Yugoslavia in areas temporarily annexed by Hungary in WWII. Included in the fascist total, because Hungary was an ally of Nazi Germany.

Rumania. 1941-87. 919,000 people murdered. Fascist then communist after 1944. For simplicity, half the deaths are assigned to communists and half to fascists.

Spain. 1936-75. 452,000 people murdered. Fascist Francisco Franco dictatorship. Mutual democide of 202,000 by Fascists and Republicans during Civil War. 250,000 by Franco thereafter. For simplicity, half the Civil War deaths are assigned to fascists. Although many communists fought in the Civil War against Franco, the deaths from the anti-Franco side are not assigned to communists.

**Total of other European mass murders: 2,108,000**

**TABLE 3**

**Selected Centi-Kilomurders (over 100,000)**

Regime Years Democide Summary

Afghanistan. 1978-87. 483,000 people murdered. Does not include battle deaths. Includes democides by pre-1979 regime, by the regime installed in 1979 by Soviet coup, by the imperial Soviet army, and by other forces.

Angola. 1975-87. 125,000 people murdered. By communist regime following independence from Portugal.

Burundi. 1964-87. 175,000 people murdered. Tutsis vs. Hutus.

China. 1917-49. 910,000 people murdered by warlords. Independent warlord regimes not under the control of the Republic of China or of the communist revolutionaries.

Ethiopia. 1941-74. 148,000 people murdered. Haile Selassie monarchy.

Ethiopia. 1974-87. 725,000 people murdered. Communist.

Guatemala. 1956-87. 122,000 people murdered. Military.

Indonesia. 1965-66. 509,000 people murdered. Killings of communists by the military, the select militia, and others following a failed communist coup attempt.

Indonesia. 1965-87. 729,000 people murdered. Against East Timor secessionists.

Iraq. 1968-87. 187,000 people murdered. Ba'ath party. Although the party had explicitly Stalinist and Hitlerist roots, the deaths are not assigned to either ideology.

Mongolia. 1916-87. 100,000 people murdered. Communist.

Mozambique. 1975-87. 323,000 people murdered. 198,000 by communist regime after 1975 independence from Portugal. Remainder by opposition RENAMO forces (Resistência Nacional Moçambicana).

Nigeria. 1967-70. 777,000 people murdered. By government and Biafran forces during Biafra's failed war of independence.

Sudan. 1956-87. 627,000 people murdered. Islamist military dictatorship. Against various ethnic or racial minorities.

Turkey. 1919-23. 878,000 people murdered. Atatürk regime. Post-WWI attacks on

Armenians and other minorities.

Uganda. 1971-79. 300,000 people murdered. Idi Amin military regime. Mainly against minority tribes and Ugandans of Asian descent.

Uganda. 1979-87. 255,000 people murdered. Post-Amin regimes.

**Total: 7,373,000**

**Grand total**: **212,981,000.**

The figures are for 1900-87, and therefore do not include mass murders by governments in the last 35 years, such as the ongoing Chinese Communist imperialist genocides in Central Asia against Tibetans, Uighurs, and other groups.

As detailed in my article and the citations therein, the overwhelming majority of the above murders were perpetrated against victims who had been assiduously disarmed by dictatorships before the killing began. The behavior and statements of mass-murdering regimes indicate that armed victims are a serious impediment to mass murder by government. As also detailed in the article, the historical record indicates that resistance by intended victims who do have arms can save many lives, even when the targeted groups lack the power to overthrow the regime.

Original Link:
https://reason.com/volokh/2022/11/09/data-on-mass-murder-by-government-in-the-20th-century/